LOVE THY NEIGHBOR?

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
The Castaways

READ ALL ABOUT IT
LOVE THY NEIGHBOR?

Discussion of Burma over the past decade has tended to focus on human rights and political developments inside the country, with much less attention given to issues of regional security. Situated between the two most populated countries in the world and adjacent to Southeast Asia's rapidly developing nations, Burma is uniquely positioned to play a major role in the geopolitics of the region. How do Burma's neighbors, each having their own economic, political, and security agendas, view the country in terms of the balance of power in Asia? A recent conference in Washington, DC turned the spotlight on these issues. Excerpts from the conference report look at external perspectives on Burma and perceptions of the country's strategic significance.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

A sudden and surprising influx of Burmese onto the island of Guam took place during the year 2000. Carrying Burmese passports, these individuals were able to travel to the U.S. territory, where previously no visa was required. Once there, nearly 1000 people claimed political asylum. Most had come from Burma's Chin state, an area of the country not readily accessible to outsiders. In a series of interviews, the asylum seekers spoke to author Edith Mirante on topics ranging from the environmental degradation of their homeland, the spread of HIV/AIDS, instances of religious persecution, and domestic drug use.

READ ALL ABOUT IT

That the media in Burma is tightly controlled and severely censored is widely known. What might not be as apparent, however, is the plight of Burmese journalists. In its annual report for the year 2000, the France-based association, Reporters Sans Frontieres, described Burma as "...the country with the most journalists in prison anywhere in the world." So scathing are the report's allegations, that Burma's military authorities felt compelled to publically refute them. *The Truth*, published by the State Peace and Development Council's Ministry of Defence, provides a point-by-point rebuttal of what it describes as "fabricated and false information." At the same time, the World Association of Newspapers announced its decision to honor two members of the Burmese media, U Win Tin and Daw San San Nweh, with the organization's 2001 Golden Pen of Freedom award. Both journalists, who are currently serving long prison sentences, are featured here.
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LOVE THY NEIGHBOR?

The Burma/Myanmar Nexus

A CONFERENCE REPORT

STRATEGIC RIVALRIES

BURMA DEBATE 4
SPRING 2001
This conference was an effort to approach the contemporary issues connected with Burma/Myanmar from a perspective that had been ignored in the policy debate on this increasingly important country. Although human rights and internal political issues are critical for the future of that state, analyses of these admittedly vital problems should be supplemented by discourse on other questions that have generally been unarticulated. Thus, this workshop on strategic issues was intended to provide a different lens through which policy makers and analysts could consider a broader range of questions.... Speakers were present from China, Japan, India, Thailand, United Kingdom, Australia, Myanmar and the United States. This report reflects the private views of all those speakers [and] amalgamates views of different participants.

INTRODUCTION

The Union of Burma/Myanmar occupies an important geographic and strategic position in Southeast Asia that is often ignored by both academics and policy-makers. Located between India and China, the world's two most populous countries, and situated on the axis of North, South, and Southeast Asia, Myanmar is of strategic interest to states in the region and beyond. With the end of the Cold War and the "rise of China," all Asian regional powers (as well as the United States) have become more attentive to the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. As Southeast Asia's largest mainland nation, Myanmar has been tenaciously independent, but Myanmar's neighbors, who have in turn changed their policies toward Rangoon in an effort to offset or at least provide an alternative to Chinese influence, have viewed Myanmar's close, recent relationship with China warily. Chinese military assistance, extensive construction of infrastructure, unrecorded investment, [increasing] but undervalued overland trade and large-scale informal migration have all prompted concerns. Myanmar has been both historically suspicious and careful of China, but intensified its relationship after the world ostracized the regime in Rangoon.

This has been perceived by some to shift the security and power balance in the region. Indian and ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] relations with Myanmar are focused on engaging...
Although this may disappoint more distant observers of the Burmese regime, such as the United States and the European Union (EU), Myanmar's near neighbors worry not only about the spread of Chinese influence, but also about the myriad problems associated with transnational refugees, drugs, epidemic disease, including HIV/AIDS, illegal migration and crime that spill across Myanmar's porous borders. Because Myanmar cannot be “hermetically sealed” (as it was following the 1962 coup), the surrounding countries have concluded that engagement in the hopes of fostering economic development and eventual regime change is the best means to arrest the instability emanating from Myanmar. Neighboring nations must reconcile the question of the internal sovereignty of that state with the regional problems that have resulted and are often rooted in history.

EXTENSION PERSPECTIVES ON MYANMAR

Since gaining independence in 1948, Myanmar has been conscious of its geo-strategic importance and has tried to remain a neutral player in the international system, but economic and security imperatives have prompted Myanmar to look for help from regional powers. The insecurity of Myanmar has forced its neighbors to tread carefully and adjust their foreign policies accordingly. The regional community wants Myanmar to remain engaged — bilaterally and within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — to help remedy the internal problems that affect the politics and population of Myanmar and the quality of life and security of its neighbors.

The Colonial Legacy

When the British granted independence to Burma in 1948, they left behind a country traumatized by colonial rule with a weak government, a fractious society, and strategic vulnerability to both China and India (having maintained a close relationship with China for thousands of years and having been incorporated into British India during colonialism). Burma's weak entrance into the international community as an independent state, coupled with its policy of neutrality, made it a hesitant player in the international system. Above all, Burma was a profoundly insecure state — insecure about its own internal system and about its place in the region and the world.

The colonial legacy produced two tendencies in Burmese society and government: a strong sense of nationalism and a weak understanding of internationalism and its importance for growth. Perceived threats to national unity were forces behind both the 1962 and 1988 military coups, but the international implications of that iron-fisted rule and the disregard for the 1990 election results were far greater than the Burmese government probably predicted. The decision to ignore the 1990 election results was a blow to the regime's credibility: [Members of the] international community either stepped back from involvement or openly condemned the regime. Myanmar must gain a greater understanding of nationalism's effects on internationalism if it expects to survive and grow in the region.

China

Although some claim that China has maintained friendly relations with Myanmar for almost 2000 years, with records available as early as the Tang dynasty [(618-907 AD)], there have been invasions and periods of tension as recently as 1967. Chinese refer to their [relationship with Myanmar] as "brothers born of the same parents." The Burmese were the first to recognize the PRC in 1949, and signed the Sino-Burmese border treaty in 1960 — the first border treaty signed after the Chinese civil war. Since then, China has conducted relations with Burma based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, and has strengthened economic ties. (The Chinese conveniently neglect to mention their support of Burmese communist insurrection.)

China has provided economic assistance to Myanmar, [that includes] investment, dual collaboration capital, factory construction, US$2 billion in military sales, training, and crop-conversion funds. Chinese officials, it was argued, are adamant about
the mutual sovereignty of their relationship, insisting that China will not turn Myanmar into a client state, nor will Myanmar become a base for Chinese forces. Military relations have been developing between the two nations, but, it is claimed, have been for the purpose of securing peaceful relations. The Chinese maintain that most military supplies sold to Myanmar have been weapons for defense.

Ignoring the results of the 1990 election isolated Myanmar from many sources of international credit, and China was the one nation willing to give economic, military, and advisory aid to the Burmese. In 1990 and 1994, China and Myanmar signed arms sales agreements and China has been willing to help with infrastructure renovations and border maintenance. It is this close relationship with China that has India and other members of the international community worried about Myanmar's future and China's intentions. Myanmar, however, is said to be resolute in its dedication to neutrality, and some academics believe it will begin to back away from dependence on China.

Chinese investment in Myanmar is grossly underestimated because it does not go through the National Investment Board. Chinese trade seems greatly undervalued and Chinese immigration into Myanmar has been extensive (estimates range from one to two million Chinese now in the country, compared to several hundred thousand before 1988). One-quarter of Mandalay is said to be Yunnanese Chinese, as is one-half of Lashio.

In spite of extensive Chinese influence, it is doubtful that Myanmar will become a Chinese satellite in the event of a regional strategic crisis. The nationalism that is so apparent in Myanmar, the strong military drive to guarantee Burmese territorial integrity, and its past ability to deal with foreign powers as a neutral during the Cold War indicate that Myanmar may have the "whip hand" in this relationship.

Once the British left Burma, India did not maintain significant trade, military or social ties with Burma, but relations between the two nations were friendly. (There had been a substantial Indian minority in Burma that controlled much of the economy in the colonial period, and many remained until expelled by the military around 1963. Rule from India and Indian economic dominance created prejudices among the Burmans that still linger.) However, 1988 witnessed a shift in the relationship because of the military crackdown, the increase in Sino-Burmese ties, and the cooling off of Indo-Burmese relations. India felt that it was caught in a pincer movement orchestrated by China, with Pakistan and Myanmar as potential supports of Chinese policy. While India, as the largest democracy in Asia, wanted to condemn the acts of the SLORC/SPDC and distance itself from positive relations with Myanmar, several factors precluded isolationism:

- Myanmar enlarged its military from 186,000 to about 400,000
- China began to give military aid to Myanmar
- India received reports of increased Burmese naval and surveillance activity in the Bay of Bengal
- Border trade between China and Myanmar increased to more than $500 million (a figure that is probably underestimated)
- Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997
- Myanmar began the deforestation of Indian territory (Andaman Islands) because of SPDC support of loggers
- There was an increase in Burmese minority and secessionist support of Naga rebels along the Burmese frontier

Faced with these security considerations and the growing power of the Burmese military regime, India has elected to increase contact with Myanmar and continues to pursue an engagement strategy. From New Delhi's viewpoint, this policy shift appears to be successful; illegal logging has declined, terrorist groups are less active, border management is better and the military regime has improved its contacts with the democratic Indian government through more frequent and mutual high-level visits. For the future, India hopes to increase multilateral ties with Myanmar by integrating it into regional economic groups, such as the Bay of Bengal Community (BIMSTEC-Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka,
Thailand, Economic Community), and the Ganges-Mekong Forum.

India is conscious of Myanmar’s strategic importance, and worries that China’s actions in the country are indicative of larger regional initiatives. India seeks to moderate the Chinese influence by exposing Myanmar to regional and international groups and [by] dealing with high-level officials in the Burmese government, thus engaging Myanmar in dialogue. India’s BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party]-led government, moreover, takes the view that an across-the-board policy of engagement with Asia — including important new initiatives in Southeast Asia (notably Indonesia and Vietnam) and with Japan — will augment India’s voice in regional developments. Rhetorically, Prime Minister [Shri Atal] Vajpayee and his Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, omit any mention of China as the perceived object of these moves, a strategy enhanced by India’s membership (along with China) in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Asia’s only formal multilateral security forum.

Of all the Southeast Asian states, Myanmar occupies the most sensitive position between India and China, giving rise to routine descriptions of a ‘Sino-India rivalry’ over the country. In this, as in other issues relating to perceived competition between Asia’s two largest powers, the Indians tend more often to see deeper designs in Chinese links with the Myanmar authorities than do the Chinese in India’s attempts, since 1993, to cultivate a ‘working relationship’ with the SLORC/SPDC. Much of China’s relationship with Myanmar has an orientation toward Southeast Asia, and reflects a natural — some say inevitable — opening of Yunnan Province to the Burman lowland via improved road and communications links. China’s interest as a riparian Mekong River state falls into this category as well. Its interest is through improved road and communications links. China’s interest as a riparian Mekong River state falls into this category as well. Nor does India alone have misgivings about China’s apparent ability to monitor traffic heading into the Straits of Malacca through joint activities with the Tatmadaw.

The Indonesians privately convey concern to the Myanmar military about Chinese influence. Beijing, in turn, takes a more [relaxed] view of India’s influence in Myanmar, confident that early enmities and friction will preserve at least minimal equidistance between Myanmar and the two Asian powers. But this does not reduce jockeying between Beijing and Delhi over access to senior officers in the SPDC.

Thailand

Thailand is the one neighbor most influenced by Myanmar’s internal problems. Fortunately, the Thai government has realized that “Thailand and Burma share a common destiny; a prosperous and secure Burma is vital for Thailand’s security and well-being.” This mindset, first voiced in 1980, is still the strategic context in Thai-Burmese relations today. Thailand remains actively involved in Myanmar. While the 1988 coup made communication difficult and relations strained, Thailand has never backed away from engagement policies.

Thailand is the nation most afflicted by Myanmar’s social problems: refugees (about 120,000 Karen and Mon in official figures), disease, drugs and terrorism. For the past twelve years, between 700,000 and one million illegal workers have fled from Myanmar to Thailand, adding tremendous pressure to local Thai governments, economies, and social programs. There has been a massive influx of narcotics, including heroin and methamphetamines, creating serious national and international problems. The 2,401 km long border shared by Thailand and Myanmar is an area of instability, with border skirmishes and terrorism taking place on a regular basis. Myanmar’s disease problem has seeped into Thailand. These diseases include a reoccurrence of polio and a new HIV/AIDS strain, in a country where the leading cause of death was already AIDS. All this has colored relations between the two countries and has even affected Thai politics.

In 1991, Thailand launched its policy of “constructive engagement.” It has been a disappointment to Bangkok; despite Thailand’s increased contact with the Burmese government, the bilateral problems remain unsolved. The greatest success of the engagement policy was the 1997 entrance of Myanmar into ASEAN. [The association’s] policy of non-interference in internal affairs, however, did not improve Thai leverage in solving the social problems plaguing both nations. Thailand has twice modified its Myanmar policy, first to “flexible engagement,” and now to “enhanced interaction.” The words have changed, but not the thrust. The enhanced interaction has purportedly been successful in that dialogue
has increased: members of the SPDC must attend ASEAN meetings where they are exposed to other government officials and the international press.

Until several years ago, Thai bilateral policy toward Myanmar was the province of the Thai military, not the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This changed under the last government and seems to have disconcerted the Burmese military, which was unsure of how to deal with this change. Under the new Thai government, it is unclear where the locus of authority will lie in this important bilateral relationship.

Unfortunately, the Burmese problem is "felt physically" in Thailand, and its borders are so porous that insurgents need only walk across the border to commit acts of international terrorism. Thailand remains hopeful that with greater integration and "enhanced interaction", the Myanmar problems will be solved and tensions between the two nations reduced. Until that time, Thailand must use its own resources and rely on its own allies to fix the internal problems that originated across the border.

Japan

Japan's policy toward Myanmar consists of four approaches: dialogue, constructive engagement, joint U.S.-Japan policy, and promoting incremental change. Japan, like the United States, supports the concept of democratic government, but seeks to interact with, rather than isolate, the current military regime. Like Thailand, Japan believes that increased interaction with regional bodies and democratic countries will incrementally change Burmese government policies on issues of concern (forced labor, human rights, disease and drugs), and believes that dialogue is crucial to maintaining a balance of power on mainland Southeast Asia.

Although Japan recognizes the potential for Chinese-Indian strategic rivalry over Myanmar, it also appreciates the power of ASEAN as a mitigating force. As an ally of the United States and a close friend and investor in several Southeast Asian countries, Japan is in a policy bind, caught between strict U.S. policies toward Myanmar and the engagement policies of ASEAN. Japan attempts to straddle both policy approaches, generally supporting the goals of the U.S. and the West, and the efforts of the ASEAN nations. Japan worries about a Myanmar closely linked to China that would materially strengthen Chinese strategic capacities close to the sea lanes between the Persian Gulf and Northeast Asia.

The United States

The United States pursues the most stringent policies toward Myanmar and was the first country to impose economic sanctions on Myanmar in 1997. Myanmar's human rights abuses, drug production and ignoring of the election results in 1990 have prompted even stronger legislation in the hopes that the military regime will weaken and begin a dialogue with the opposition that could move [the country] toward democracy. The U.S. has enacted policies restricting bilateral assistance, private investment, and contact between the two nations through denying American visas to high-level regime personnel, although it has indirectly provided anti-drug and humanitarian aid through the UN and international [non-governmental organizations (NGOs)].

U.S. foreign policy toward Myanmar has been likened to a train on a set of tracks, unable to diverge unless a crisis interrupts the policy direction. Currently, the U.S. doctrine is to support democratic and oppose authoritarian regimes — to advocate a quick, unequivocal democratic shift. [Polarized views on whether] such a shift is feasible, or whether a more incremental approach to pluralism in [Myanmar's] society is a rational alternative policy, make debate on this issue difficult. Some charge that U.S. policy toward Myanmar has been focused on a single individual, and question the wisdom of such an approach as a generic issue in foreign policy. This ad hominem element of U.S. policy has been based on the close relationship between the former Secretary of State [Madeleine Albright] and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Whether this will continue under the new U.S. administration is uncertain. If, however, the humanitarian crisis escalates, if regional equanimity dissipates, or if the military regime collapses, the U.S. will obviously have to re-examine its Myanmar policy and
re-evaluate the strategic importance of the country. The issue is whether such a policy re-evaluation should take place in the absence of fundamental power shifts [within Myanmar’s] society or if there are cosmetic changes that do not affect the military’s essential control. With the present increased political dialogue, one participant noted that “the trends are all very much hopeful for the first time in over a decade,” and if the situation arises, the U.S. will be ready to lend support. Until then, the U.S. policy of non-involvement will continue, leaving Southeast Asia to engage Myanmar without the U.S. and the EU.

ASEAN

The central debate surrounding ASEAN’s Myanmar policy is whether or not the regional body will mitigate China’s influence on Myanmar. ASEAN has been an important venue for Myanmar’s relations with its Southeast Asian neighbors because it provides a structure for dealing with the transnational issues that strain relations among them. Additionally, the members of ASEAN believe some good will come of exposing Myanmar to non-authoritarian regimes.

Myanmar was first exposed to ASEAN after the military regime took power, attending several meetings and settling some disputes with Thailand within the organization. Thailand invited Myanmar to join the organization, and once satisfied with the sanctity of ASEAN’s non-intervention policy, Myanmar became a member in 1997. Before Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997, ASEAN states had quiet discussions at all levels with Myanmar officials, but they were not very successful; the problems seemed intractable even without the issue of the NLD. Opponents to Myanmar’s ascension into the group cite the increased access China has to the organization, and the too-broad membership of ASEAN that could preclude cooperation. Yet ASEAN has made it clear to the Myanmar authorities that discussion of transnational issues is part of the terms of the relationship. Myanmar’s problems are discussed frankly in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). This informal meeting of heads of state led to the positive outcome of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed’s January 2001 visit to Myanmar. According to a participant at the ARF, none of this would have been possible without Myanmar joining ASEAN.

MYANMAR’S RESPONSE

Myanmar’s long history as a tributary, a colony, and a country riddled with insurgencies has led [its] officials to place great emphasis on their foreign policy of neutrality, independence, and interaction. While Myanmar acknowledges its important location between China and India and on the border between North and Southeast Asia, it “hopes to be used as a bridge of all these blocs” and as a “role model” of a state [positioned] between major neighbors, according to one participant. Additionally, it maintains that the international perception of the Chinese-Myanmar partnership is vastly overestimated, and seeks to distance itself from perceptions of dependency.

The military regime asserts that the sanctions, loss of funding and decline in diplomatic relations after the 1988 coup was a drastic miscalculation by the international community about the internal situation in Myanmar. The government maintains that the military regime took power because the Burmese people were suffering under the Socialist regime, and that the amount of individual and political freedom afforded to the Burmese after the coup was greater than pre-1988. The election results were ignored by the SLORC because the NLD allegedly tried to take power without drafting a Constitution — and the SLORC felt that security and freedom would be greater under a military government than under the newly elected one. Before 1988, Burma had good relations with all countries and the multilateral banks, but after 1988, all support stopped. Before 1988, there was only one legal party, but after 1988 the SLORC allowed diverse parties to be formed. (The West has put personality over policies and ideology since 1988, and now relations are at their lowest ebb.)

Myanmar’s government believes that a large military is crucial to the preservation of Burmese sovereignty and internal security, and resents the stringent foreign policies pursued by the United States, the European Union and others. As one par-
Participant commented, "if you are going to interfere in this discussion, you must treat Myanmar like a leader and not a sister... lecturing is unnecessary." For now, according to a participant, a large military seems to be the best way of preserving the national unity of Myanmar, and the military has been successful in orchestrating both cease-fires and counter-insurgencies.

The Myanmar government acknowledges the social problems that plague the country and seep into neighboring populations. It actively seeks assistance from international organizations and [NGOs] and is willing to cooperate with recommendations involving drugs, disease and poverty. Myanmar does not deny the problems, but lacks the funds — and, some would say — the skills to appropriately and comprehensively combat them.

Over the past ten years, Myanmar has begun to participate internationally, increasing both bilateral and multilateral relations in the region. These relations will continue as long as Myanmar's sovereignty, territorial integrity and internal policy-making freedom remain unthreatened. If outside powers do not intervene, dialogue will probably continue between the SPDC and the NLD. Myanmar realizes the steps it must take to develop, but it must take these steps alone and of its own accord, or the process will deteriorate.

**CONCLUSION**

Myanmar has the potential to be the focus of regional and international tensions, but is the strategic rivalry over Myanmar real or perceived?

**Real.** Some believe that Myanmar’s close relationship [with] China, its large military and its border skirmishes with Thailand indicate that regional rivalry is very much a reality. Some theorize that ASEAN nations pursue policies of engagement and interaction in an attempt to balance China’s influence on Myanmar, and India has made similar policy changes in order to cultivate a closer working relationship to mitigate bilateral, regional, and strategic problems. Some also claim that Myanmar has acquired strategic significance because of its impact on demographics and migration, ethnic conflict, trade, health, crime, transportation and security extending beyond its borders to the security of the sea lanes and the Malacca Straits.

**Perceived.** On the other hand, some academics and officials believe that the rivalry has not reached [a head]. Is it indeed rivalry or something less acute? Experts acknowledge that a "strategic awareness" exists in Southeast Asia, but greater policy attention is given to transnational and humanitarian concerns than to geopolitical positioning. Those on this side of the argument predict that the strategic importance will grow proportionally to China’s involvement in Southeast Asia and China’s rivalry with the United States. Whatever rivalry may exist over Myanmar was characterized by one participant as "geo-politics ‘lite’" in that there is no flashpoint and only Asian countries are involved. Asian states, so the argument runs, concentrate more on social and security concerns [than do Western powers, which tend to] focus on political change. Should China and India’s jockeying for influence in Myanmar become more heated, should the United States feel that its interests in Southeast Asia are threatened, or should the balance of power and security shift in Asia, Myanmar will take on great strategic importance. Until then, countries will pursue relations with Myanmar [in a manner that will] illustrate their own perceptions about the strategic rivalry.

Real or perceived, there is no doubt that the importance of Myanmar will increase over time, and this factor must also be taken into account when formulating a Myanmar policy. Although the need for realpolitik policy-making has declined since the Cold War, balance-of-power politics have not disappeared. Myanmar must be examined in its new geo-strategic context, as well as in terms of human rights and democratic principles. There may not be a need for policy change, but there should at least be dialogue — that is what the international community is asking of Myanmar, and it is the least Myanmar should expect in return.

*The complete report can be found on the web at www.georgetown.edu/sfs/program/asia.*
The castaways
Refugees Stranded on the Island of Guam

BY EDITH T. MIRANTE
During the year 2000, nearly a thousand refugees from Burma arrived on the island of Guam, a United States territory in the Pacific Ocean. They came seeking asylum in the U.S., having fled extraordinary levels of persecution in their homeland. Most were from northern Burma, especially Chin State. Forced repatriation and hostility towards Burma's refugees by her northern neighbors, India and China, had apparently led these individuals to take the creative escape route of flying to Guam, which until recently allowed people from Burma to visit (for tourism) without a visa. Once there, they applied for political asylum in hopes of reaching the U.S. mainland.

The Guam escape route, now shut down, was an expensive and risky option used by particularly desperate people. They had to have access to the considerable financial resources needed for passports, plane tickets, and other arrangements. The result was a refugee population on Guam that was not only skewed towards those from especially remote and isolated regions of Burma, but which was weighed towards what would ordinarily be the "elite" in those areas. The education level of the Guam asylum-seekers was conspicuously high. Doctors, pastors, student activists, academics and NGO workers were found stranded on the island, as well as at least one elected Member of Parliament and a former Army/Police Lt. Colonel. Many could be characterized as political activists, who not only were targeted for mistreatment by Burma's military because of their ethnicity, religion, or political views, but were consciously engaged in a variety of ways of resisting the regime. They were risk-takers who fled only when they were one step away from arrest or worse.

In March 2001 Project Maje conducted interviews with a small cross-section of the Guam asylum seekers. They included ethnic Chin, Kachin and Burman. The interview sample was somewhat representative of their demographics, in terms of ethnicity and gender. The interviewees revealed a great deal of significant new information and details about recent conditions in Burma.
ONGOING FORCED LABOR

The interviewees consistently described the continuation of forced labor throughout the year 2000 (when most of them had left Burma). This included the forced plantation of tea in the Chin State for the military’s commercial purposes, which was reportedly going on at the very time the International Labour Organization was sanctioning the regime for using forced labor.

Q • In the two or three months just before you left, at the end of 2000, was the army asking people to work for it?

A • (Chin health worker) Yes, they did, for the planting of tea in the Chin Hills. They forced all the villagers to do the planting. They forced the villagers to plant only tea. The military got the tea seeds from somewhere else, and the agriculture department raised the seeds, and the [seedlings] they forced them to plant. They forced them to plant it in many areas of Chin State. Most of the places were forest areas. They cleared the forests and forced them to plant the tea. They started in July and August to force them to clear the forests. They were still doing [the planting] in October, November.

CONDITIONS IN DETENTION/PRISON

Several of the interviewees gave first hand accounts of brutal conditions in detention and imprisonment.

Q • Tell about your treatment while in custody...

A • (Chin pastor) There were a number of methods of torture. Once, they put a plastic [bag] around my head to suffocate me. Another time, they stripped me naked to be eaten by mosquitoes. They gave me meals consisting of rice mixed with sand. The first time I was in prison, they literally shot at my head and somehow missed it, whether intentionally or not. They also forced me to kneel on the ground, on sharp rocks for hours and put shackles on my legs.

A • (Burman student activist) I was sentenced from ’92 to ’95 to Insein Prison. After Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released [from house arrest], in 1995, my friend and I were transferred to Myingyan Prison in upper Burma, the third oldest [prison] in Burma. It is very bad, the worst in Burma. Heavy torture. It is near the Irrawaddy River, around 50 miles south of Mandalay. Twenty-nine other political prisoners were brought there with me. I think that two or three of them may have been Members of Parliament. They were detained and sentenced to 35 years.

I want to explain about Myingyan Prison. In Insein we were managed directly by the jail authorities. But in Myingyan we were put together with murderers and all the criminals. Most of the time we were oppressed by those criminals. So whatever happened, the authorities gave their responsibilities to them. When we first arrived in the Myingyan Jail, those criminals were waiting with sticks. We were blindfolded with some blankets and the criminals started beating us. It was so we would be afraid at that jail and not complain. They don’t like complaints.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

The regime’s attempts to humiliate the largely Christian indigenous peoples of the north were well described by the Chin and Kachin interviewees. The military authorities go to great lengths to discourage the Christian faith and to promote Buddhism, the national religion. The regime also desecrates cultural remnants of Animism, as in their destruction of cemeteries and confiscation of the [venerated] mithun cattle [a type of large domesticated ox].

Q • During the last two years you were in Falam, [a city in Chin State] what was the attitude towards religious practice?

A • (Chin pastor) There was a commanding officer named Col. Than Aung. He told me straight to my face that, “Chins are our enemies, because Western people are our enemies.” Christianity is a Western religion, and
Christians and probably pastors, are the number one enemy of the State. The cross that we planted on the hilltop, they cut down, and on every hill they put up a Buddhist temple. Not only church buildings, but anything related to the [Christian] religion, is banned. When they believe that the situation is [unstable in our area], they will even forbid us to worship.

A • (Chin pastor) One of the unique animals found in the Chin State is the mithun. Each household used to raise the mithun. It was one of the symbols of the Chin people, and one of our wealths. We killed that animal only when we celebrated a big ceremony, as in ancient times. From one mithun we can get 200 viss of meat (about 300 kilograms). All the mithuns have been bought by the military who sell them to foreign countries. If our own Chin people sold these animals across the border into India, we would be arrested and put into the jail for five to six years. Because those who had connections with the military, sold all those mithuns to another country, there are hardly any left. They are almost extinct.

KACHIN STATE SITUATION

Since the 1994 ceasefire arrangement between the Kachin Independence Organization/Army [KIO/KIA] and the regime of Burma, not much has been heard about ongoing human rights violations in Kachin State. The Kachin interviewees described conditions that were little better than in the rest of Burma's frontier regions. While forced portering has decreased with the downsizing of army maneuvers, other types of infrastructure forced labor have continued, and apparently widened in scope. According to interviewees, former Kachin rebel territory was inexorably ceded to the regime's troops, and corruption and violent purges took place within the KIO.

Q • Could you compare the situation in Kachin State before and after the ceasefire?

A • (KIO sergeant) Before the ceasefire, all the servicemen in the KIO had a kind of unity and mentality to fight against the military government for our homeland. But since the ceasefire, all those traits have melted and we have become weak, not just physically but also mentally. There was much disappointment and unhappiness. Most of us disagreed with the ceasefire, because there's no benefit or advantage for ordinary soldiers and the people.

Q • What did you hear about relations between the local people and the government troops in those former KIA areas?

A • (KIO sergeant) After the Tatmadaw [government forces] arrived in the area, they made those local people abandon their homes and their villages, and relocated them to places farther away from the KIA-controlled areas to make it so they are not able to have contact with the KIA or to help the KIA.

Q • Did those people have to work for the government army?

A • Yes. Almost every day or every week, they had to work for the military, doing all sorts of things for those soldiers. Sometimes they need to build fencing for the military camp, and all the villagers are [told] to do that. They had mostly been under KIA control, before the ceasefire, but afterwards, the Burmese soldiers drove the KIO or KIA soldiers further away. In the past, the local Kachin people were forced to be porters. Now there's no portering, but still they need to work for the military. In every village, one or two persons have to be on standby for the military outposts.

CHIN STATE CONDITIONS

While some interviewees criticized the past neglect of development in the Chin State, it should be emphasized that development now in progress, including foreign extractive industries, is even more dangerous, in terms of environmental havoc, forced labor, and other exploitation. The previous lack of
A • (Chin pastor) There are three hydroelectric power plants in Chin State. The engines were in Tiddim, Falam and Haka. Those machines were donated by Australia to Haka and Falam. But the military took those machines, and replaced them with Chinese-made machines. They took the Australian-donated machines to Mogok and Mandalay. During the construction of that hydroelectric power station in Tiddim, the people were forced to work for the power plant. In 1998, I saw with my own eyes when a soldier shot one of the Chins with a gun. He died in Falam Hospital. They will distribute the electric power produced there to the army camp as the first priority.

A • (Chin pastor) Food production is very low in our region. We rely on the food from outside of Chin State. Sometimes [the government] limits the rice. When they hold up the rice for one week in Falam, we have no more rice to eat. This morning I got information that people are not allowed to carry rice from Kalemyo, in Sagaing Division, to Falam anymore. When the military wants to do something to the Chin people, first they cut off the rice. After that, the military thinks they can do anything they want to.

Q • Is there logging in that area?

A • (Kachin shopkeeper) Yes, the government gives permits to businessmen, mostly Chinese, to cut the wood, and take the gold and cane for trading. They hire the local people and people who come from Myitkyina, not just Kachin, everyone. Because of the logging and mining, most of the mountains and the hillsides have been emptied of forests. Everything’s changed, even the wildlife. In the past we heard the sounds of wildlife. But no more. They all ran away. You can hardly see any wild animals in the area anymore.

Q • What kinds of animals were there before?

A • There were so many things — tigers, monkeys and boars. Especially monkeys, so many monkeys, but no more.

Q • About how many people are working around the Hpakant [jade] mines?

A • (Kachin pastor) I’m not sure. Many. They come from the whole of Burma. Several places. All kinds of people. Now, even from China. The Chinese, even if they don’t speak Burmese or Kachin, can come in because they give money when they pass through the [customs] gate.

Q • Has it changed since when you were first there?

A • Oh yeah. Up until 1993, people from outside could not come in. Also there were not
Q • Has the environment in that area changed since you started?

A • Yeah, because they are always digging the mountains, the hill areas. They will just dig down, and the mountains will become flat. The way of streams will be changed. Suppose the stream is going like this and they want to dig there, they will just [divert] it another way.

Q • Is there a narcotics problem in Hpakant?

A • Yeah, it is most popular in Hpakant. All kinds of people, anybody.

Q • How do they use it?

A • Injection. Smoking [opium] is not popular. The "ya ma" — the tablet that you burn and breathe in, that is the most popular now. The Number 4 [heroin], they just inject.

Q • Do they have their own needles for injection?

A • I suppose that they have their own. And also there is maybe some center for having that injection, a shop, or a business center.

Q • Have you heard anything about HIV/AIDS in the Hpakant area?

A • It is very [prevalent], even in Myitkyina or Hpakant. I have had many experiences caring for that kind of sickness. We can’t do anything for those who are suffering from AIDS, we just encourage them and pray for them.

AIDS, DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

The Guam interviewees provided front-line information about the AIDS epidemic that is making its grim progress into the remote mountains of Burma, and about efforts to evade the regime’s denial about it. They also gave accounts of the promotion of alcohol and drugs to indigenous people of the northwest.

Q • Are there people who are not real doctors who give injections in the villages?

A • (Chin health worker) Yes, there are a lot of the illegal ones. The villagers told me about it. One person previously worked in mining, in some other place in Burma. Later on he went to Malaysia and worked, and he came back. He tested HIV positive when he was in Rangoon. Then he went back to his native village near Kale in Chin State. The people in that village thought that being HIV positive was the same thing as having the AIDS disease. He was treated by a person who practices illegally. That person gave him some IV [drip] line with some glucose, some vitamins and other things to that patient. The patient was so weak, he could not bear the IV line, and half of the bottle was left. They didn’t want to discard the remaining [IV solution] so the father of that patient used that same IV solution, because it has a lot of vitamins. The person who practices illegally, [used] the IV line for the father of that patient. Later on, the patient died. Then the father also died, because of the infection.

In some places, they use disposable syringes. But in some places they just flush syringes and other needles with hot water. The hot water that they used to flush the needles and the syringes, they use again.

For the full text of the interviews, see the report Ashes and Tears on Project Maje’s website <www.project-maje.org>. To learn more about helping the Guam asylum seekers, including sponsoring them for US residence, contact: Rev. Joan Maruskin, Church World Service and Witness Immigration and Refugee Program, 202-544-2375, jmaruskin@nccusa.org

THE TRUTH

A Review of the Annual Report for the Year 2000 of the Reporters Sans Frontieres

BY THE OFFICE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The annual report for the Year 2000 of the Reporters Sans Frontieres based in Paris, France includes a chapter in which it states: "Myanmar is a country where the largest number of news reporters have been incarcerated in jail throughout the entire world." It goes on the report that "...its newspapers also contain biased reports and that when foreign correspondents apply for entry visas, they are pressured into promising to interview at least one member of the Military Government." It also claims that "...those correspondents who enter the country on a tourist visa are brutally interrogated and then deported; that such media personnel are being killed in addition to which many have been detained, persecuted and suppressed for many reasons."

These allegations have probably been made to make it appear that in Myanmar, freedom of the press is non-existent and that correspondents working in the cause of democracy are being persecuted. The intention is to convey to the media world fabricated and false information that news correspondents in Myanmar have been deprived of their democratic and human rights so that nations of the world would be filled with misconceptions and focus critically on the Myanmar Government and exert all kinds of pressure on it. The list of persons mentioned in the report of the Reporters Sans Frontieres does not include any one who is a journalist by profession. A few may have been news reporters at one time but they gave up their profession many years ago to earn their livelihood through other means. The majority of them however have never had any connection whatsoever with the news media. But the report refers to them all as professional journalists. Action was taken against these people because their actions infringed laws of the State that are currently in force. But the wording of the statements implied that action had been taken in contact with the NLD or had taken part in democracy movements. Much of the information contained in the report of the Reporters Sans Frontieres has made these allegations deliberately though knowing them to be false, then it is an organization that lacks professional integrity.

"The Truth" Volume 7 has hereby been compiled and presented in order that it may be studied in comparison with the report of the Reporters Sans Frontieres so that the latter's credibility may be judged.

Colonel Than Tun
Office of Strategic Studies, Union of Myanmar

Date: 16-5-2000
Ministry of Defence
The Office of Strategic Studies

The TRUTH
Allegations that Myanmar is a country with the largest number of news correspondents in prison in the world and that the Myanmar news media is biased.

**THE ALLEGATIONS IN THE REPORT**

The Reporters Sans Frontieres, in its annual report for the Year 2000 alleged that Myanmar is the only country in the world with the largest number of news correspondents in prison.

There are regulations for censorship of false news intended to subvert and destabilize the country, but there is no attempt to control or censor or suppress authentic news. There is a Foreign Correspondents Club in Myanmar with correspondents employed by foreign news agencies as members. It can easily be verified whether the Government or organizations related to the Government have, at any time, tried to control or take any interceptive actions against transmission of news by these correspondents of foreign news agencies.

**ALLEGATION**

This annual report also claims that The New Light of Myanmar newspapers while publishing long articles praising the achievements of the leaders of Government never fails to attack Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD party.

**FACTS**

This allegation does not merit a special explanation. The articles referred to were written by columnists to inform the public of their personal opinions and criticisms regarding Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's actions and that of her party. This is to enable the Myanmar people to know the actual state of affairs and see clearly whether such actions will benefit the country and the people or whether it will lead to disastrous results. The perpetrators are in the best position to know whether the articles contain prevarications or not. They are not biased attacks. Moreover Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD are not the Government and there is no need for the newspaper to highlight their activities. It is a well-known fact that it is normal practice for the state-owned newspapers to give priority to news about the Government rather than a political party. Government newspapers are not meant to be prejudiced in any way. The statements included in the [RSF] annual report indicate clearly that their goal is to enhance Aung San Suu Kyi's image rather than to give an objective report on the situation in Myanmar.
The Allegation concerning the entry of foreign correspondents into the country

THE ALLEGATION
The report alleges that foreign correspondents who want an entry visa to Myanmar have to give an undertaking that they will interview at least one member of the Military Government and that those who enter the country on a tourist visa are brutally interrogated and then deported.

FACT
This allegation is without any logical foundation. Entry visas for correspondents [are] limited in the sense that those correspondents who have the integrity to report the situation in the country objectively are under no restraints and obtain their visas easily. But there are those who wish to enter the country with a preconceived plan to write biased reports with a view to manipulating events from behind the scenes and bring about the destruction of Myanmar. The applications of such individuals who wish to enter the country in the guise of correspondents are therefore carefully scrutinized. If visas are granted to such individuals the country will not benefit in any way but will instead suffer a setback. The allegation that a correspondent has to give an undertaking [sic] to interview at least one member of the Military Government is totally false. The fact is that there are so many correspondents who wish to meet the state authorities that not all of them get the opportunity to see them. The issuance of a visa to a foreign visitor is the sovereign right of a state and is part of the democratic process. No one can deny that even those superpowers who claim that human rights is their principal concern pursue a policy that controls the issuance of visas.

The accusation that those who enter the country on tourist visas are brutally interrogated and then deported is absolutely false. A news correspondent who enters the country with the proper credentials has no problems at all. But the entry of one under false pretences as a tourist is, to say the least, most questionable. The purpose of such a person is to collect false information and fabricate news. Should such unethical acts be overlooked? Such a person has not entered the country as an acknowledged professional correspondent but has instead sneaked in, posing as a tourist. It is the sovereign right of the Government concerned to make inquiries and take appropriate action against such an individual.

The Allegation that news correspondents are being killed in Myanmar

THE ALLEGATION
It was alleged in the report that news photographer U Tha Win and seven news correspondents of the Kyemon Myanmar Language Daily newspaper were arrested for publishing a photograph of Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt with the caption "The World's Most Famous Crook" adjacent to a news article. It then stated that these people were dismissed from their jobs; that moreover U Tha Win died during interrogation by Military Intelligence agents.

FACTS
The report that news photographer U Tha Win died during interrogation by Military Intelligence personnel is totally false. Nor was U Tha Win ever arrested or interrogated by anyone whatsoever. U Tha Win was a well-known alcoholic and was not in good health. He was living with his family when his health deteriorated and his condition became critical on 24-9-99. He was rushed to the Worker's Hospital, where he died on 30-9-99. That seven people were arrested and dismissed from their jobs for publishing Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt's photograph, as claimed in the report is entirely false. No employee of any newspaper has been either arrested or dismissed. The claim made in the report is not only false but is a prevarication with no correspondence to any actual incidents.

THE ALLEGATION
This annual report also claims that assistant editor of the Botataung Myanmar Language Daily U Saw Win was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison after being elected in the general elections as an NLD candidate. It further said that while in prison, he died of heart failure on 7-8-99 because he was not given the proper medical care needed.
GOLDEN PEN AWARD

Press Freedom Prize Goes to Burmese Journalists

Two Burmese editors have been awarded the 2001 Golden Pen of Freedom, the annual press freedom prize of the World Association of Newspapers. San San Nweh and U Win Tin are both serving long prison sentences for advocating freedom of expression and democracy.

The award, announced on Tuesday by the Board of the Paris-based WAN, was made in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the cause of press freedom.

In a statement, the Board said: "San San Nweh and U Win Tin were imprisoned for their support of Burma’s freedom movement. Both have suffered unspeakable hardships, and both are in poor health. Prison authorities have offered to release them if they renounce all political activity, and both have refused to do so. We honor their sacrifice and hope their dreams of Burmese democracy will soon be fulfilled. Their imprisonment is a deep blemish on the international standing of Burma which can only be erased by their release."

Dissident writer San San Nweh, 56, was the first woman to train as a journalist in Burma. She was editor of two journals — Git a Ppade-tha and Einmet-hpu — and is a novelist and poet.

She was imprisoned for ten years in August 1994 for "anti-government reports" to French journalists and for "providing information about the human rights situation to the UN special rapporteur for Burma."

She is reportedly sharing a tiny cell with three other political ‘convicts’ — forced to squat because of lack of head room, and allowed to talk for only 15 minutes a day. She is suffering from liver disease, arthritis, partial paralysis and eye problems.

U Win Tin is the former editor of the daily Hanthawati newspaper, vice-chair of the Burmese Writers Association and a founder of the National League of Democracy, Burma’s main pro-democracy party whose landslide election victory in 1990 was not recognised by the military regime.

The leader of the party, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, has called U Win Tin "a man of courage and integrity. He could not be intimidated into making false confessions. ... He is as clear as ever and his spirit is upright and unwavering."

U Win Tin was arrested in 1989, tried in a closed military court and sentenced to 14 years in prison for allegedly being a member of the banned Communist Party of Burma. He has now served ten years of that sentence.

According to information received by WAN, U Win Tin was crippled by prison guards who beat him severely and repeatedly when he was being held in the notorious Insein Prison. Accused of smuggling out letters detailing the conditions in the prison, he was transferred to a former guard-dog kennel and kept in solitary confinement for just under a year, until he was sentenced to an additional five years imprisonment for possessing writing materials.

In 1997 U Win Tin was transferred from Myingyan Jail to Rangoon General Hospital. According to reports, he is still in this hospital, and reported close to death, but his prison sentence will only expire in July 2008.


WAN defends and promotes press freedom worldwide. It represents 17,000 newspapers; its membership includes 66 national newspaper associations, individual newspaper executives in 93 countries, 17 news agencies and seven regional and world-wide press groups.

Press release of the World Association of Newspapers, Nov. 28, 2000
FACTS
The statement made in the report seems to insinuate that U Saw Win was imprisoned because he was elected as a representative of the NLD party. Saw Win was not on the permanent staff of the Botataung Daily but a free-lance reporter up to the year 1981 when he resigned. After giving up his job he became a timber trader. Then after the disturbances of 1988, when political parties were being formed, he joined the NLD. He stood for election as an NLD candidate of Htilin Township and was elected representative-elect. But the charge against him was not political. As a timber merchant, he had obtained a tender to supply 86 tons of timber of the Thanlyin Bridge project, but had not done so and had instead misappropriated it. He was thus charged under Sections 6 (1) of The Public Property Protection Act and sentenced to 11 years imprisonment on 24-4-91. He was said to have suffered from chronic bronchitis and while serving his sentence he suffered a relapse. So he was given treatment altogether 174 times at the prison hospital between the period 6-7-95 to 23-4-98. He was admitted as an in-patient in the prison hospital from 12 to 19 May 1998 and was later moved to the Thayawaddy District Hospital and put under the care of senior physicians on 5-8-98. But his condition became worse and he died in Thalryawaddy District Hospital on 7-8-98. He was sentenced to prison for committing a crime and died while serving his sentence. The Government did not put him to death. Even those prisoners who have been sentenced to death by the Government are still alive and well in prison because their sentences have not yet been carried out.

The Allegation that dissidents and newspapermen are being arrested and detained in prison

THE ALLEGATION
It was alleged in the report that well-known anti-government activists have been imprisoned for giving interviews to foreign news agencies; that Daw San San [Nweh] of the NLD was found guilty of being interviewed by the BBC and RFA and sentenced to 25 year imprisonment.

If it were the practice to arrest and imprison any person interviewed by foreign news agencies, U Tin Oo and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as other members of the NLD Central Executive Committee would have been put in prison with no chance of ever leaving. Daw San was sentenced because she participated in a conspiracy to set up a parallel Government in 1990. She was duly charged under Section 122 (1) of the State Subversion Act on 30-4-91 and being found guilty convicted and sentenced to 25 years in prison. But the Government, on humanitarian grounds, commuted her sentence to a lesser term. Under the amnesty granted in accordance with Section 401(1) of the Penal Code, the Ministry of Home Affairs suspended her remaining sentence.
on condition that she would in no way be involved in treasonous acts against the State, and that she would behave in an exemplary manner and not break the law during this period of probation. She was thus released on 1-5-97. But after her release Daw San San contacted foreign media organizations to feed them with rumors and false information and was also part of a group of dissidents attempting to create disturbances to disrupt law and order. Hence on 31-10-97, the amnesty she had been granted was revoked in accordance with Section 401(3) of the Penal Code and she is now serving the original sentence passed on her. She was imprisoned again because she failed to abide by the laws of the State.

THE ALLEGATION

The report stated that U Win Tin, San San Nwe, Sein Hla Oo, Moe Thu, Sunny (a) Khin Maung Win, U Thar Ban, Soe Thein (Maung Wun Tha), Ohn Kyaing, U Thein Dan, Aung Zin Min, Cho Hseint, Sein Haing and Myo Myint Nyein — 13 persons in all — were now in prison, that stiff prison terms had been meted out to them because they were close followers of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party. That U Win Tin was arrested on 4-7-89 and sentenced to three years in prison with labor in October. This sentence was later extended to 11 years and that he was arrested simply because he was a politically active member of the NLD. San San Nwe was arrested because she had met and held discussions with two French news correspondents in April of 1993 and that stiff prison terms had been meted out to them because they were close followers of Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD party. That U Win Tin was arrested on 4-7-89 and sentenced to three years in prison with labor in October. This sentence was later extended to 11 years and that he was arrested simply because he was a politically active member of the NLD. San San Nwe was arrested because she had met and held discussions with two French news correspondents in April of 1993 and that persons who visited her in jail with food and other necessities had also been threatened in various ways. Action had been taken against Sein Hla Oo because he translated Aung San Suu Kyi’s book Freedom from Fear into the Myanmar Language and had therefore been sentenced to 14 years in prison in 1994. With regard to Moe Thu, the report said he was a journalist and had been a reporter of the Dana, a Myanmar economic magazine. That in May 1996 he had been arrested in accordance with Section 10(a) of the Law for the Protection of the State, a provision that permits a person so charged to be detained for an unlimited period without benefit of trial. The report went on to state that Sunny (a) Khin Maung Win was a news photographer who was arrested for taking a picture of Aung San Suu Kyi being interviewed that was presumably shown at the ASEAN Summit held at Bangkok; that he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment in August 1997 on the charge that he had deliberately broadcast information which he knew was false. In the case of U Tha Ban of the Kyemon Myanmar Language Daily, he had been arrested in March and sentenced to a seven-year prison term for helping student leaders to publish a book. That he was at present suffering from a serious eye ailment, but that the authorities had denied his request for treatment by an ophthalmologist. Then the report alleged that Soe Thein (Maung Wun Tha) of the Botataung Myanmar Daily had been charged and arrested under Section 10 (a). Further that Ohn Kyaing, a columnist of both the Kyemon Daily and Hanthawaddy Daily who had been writing under the pseudonym of Aung Wint had been arrested in August 1990 and sentenced to 17 years in prison. In other incidents, it said that Thein Dan, also a news correspondent of the Kyemon and Hanthawaddy Myanmar Dailies had been arrested and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in 1990. That Aung Zin Min, a correspondent of New Style magazine was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison for writing and publishing pro-democracy articles and that at present he was serving his sentence in Thayawaddy Prison. Freelance correspondent Cho Hseint was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison for being a pro-democracy activist and is now in Hanthawaddy Prison. That Sein Hlaing and Myo Myint Nyein, who were both columnists for Culture Magazine, were arrested in September 1990 and each sentenced to seven years imprisonment for writing and distributing anti-government pamphlets. The Reporters Sans Frontieres had falsely claimed in its annual report that these 13 individuals who had infringement the laws in force were in actual fact bona fide newsmen, still pursuing their profession.

FACTS

Win Tin at one time was Editor-in-Chief of the Hanthawaddy newspaper but he was given retirement in 1970 and since then had given up journalism as a profession. Action was taken against Win Tin for arranging the termination of the pregnancy of NLD youth Ma Thu Za who had conceived a
child by another NLD youth Soe Thein. Forced abortion is against the law; so Win Tin was sentenced to three years imprisonment for his involvement. He was also found guilty of giving seditious talks, organizing subversive movements within the NLD and writing and publishing pamphlets to incite treason against the State. He was accordingly charged under Section 5 (j) of the Emergency Provisions Act for which he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. While in prison, he had secretly published anti-government propaganda to create riots in jail. So he was charged under Section 5 (e) of the Emergency Provisions Act and being found guilty, sentenced to seven year’s imprisonment. He is now serving a total of 20 year’s imprisonment. He was charged and sentenced not because he was a reporter of journalism, but because he had violated the laws of the State. Moreover he was no longer pursuing his former career as a news correspondent when charges were brought against him.

In the case of San San Nweh also, she was not charged on the count of holding discussions with two French journalists in April 1993 as reported. Action was taken against her because she had conspired with dental surgeon Dr. Khin Zaw Win to smuggle fabricated news copied on computer discs out of the country. She had also written false news reports and made attempts to have them broadcast and was in close contact with expatriate Sein Win’s group, an illegal organization. She was thus charged with infringing section 5 (e) of the Emergency Provisions Act and Section 17 (1) of the Unlawful Association Act respectively and being found guilty, sentenced to ten years in prison. Up to now she has not been forbidden visitors and visitors are allowed in accordance with prison rules and regulations.

Moe Thu is not a news correspondent nor was he on the news staff of Dana magazine. He is a scriptwriter and director of films. Concerning the allegation that he was detained in May 1996 under Section 10 (a) of the Subversion Against the State Act that allows a person to be detained for an indefinite period, it should be made clear that Moe Thu had tried to stir up mass unrest under the name of the NLD. He had also been one of the ringleaders who had attempted to organize a mass rally to incite and create general unrest. He was thus detained under Section 10 (a) of the above act. It should however be pointed out that this provision is just a preventive measure. Under orders issued by the
Ministry of Home Affairs the charge under Section 10 (a) was revoked and Moe Thu was released on 3-1-2000.

Sunny (Khin Maung Win) is neither a professional photographer nor newsman. It is not true that he was arrested for filming an interview given by Aung San Suu Kyi that was shown at the Bangkok ASEAN Summit. Nor is it true that he had been arrested because he had deliberately broadcast a news report, which he knew very well was false and later sentenced to seven years in prison. Action was taken against him because he had actively participated in trying to incite student unrest and he was sentenced in accordance with the law.

U Tha Ban also is not a bona fide news correspondent and his only experience was as translator of the Kyemon Myanmar Language Daily in 1962. He took voluntary retirement in 1979 and started practice as a lawyer of the Central Court of Justice. After the unrest of 1988 he became a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Rakhine League for Democracy while continuing his law practice until the time he was sentenced to imprisonment. He was sentenced to a seven-year prison term on 28 April 1988 under Section 5 (j) of the Emergency Provisions Act for trying to incite unrest among the people and for his contacts with illegal organizations. He enjoys all benefits of a prisoner such as medical treatment and visits of family and friends in accordance with prison regulations.

Soe Thein (Maung Wuntha). Action was taken against him in accordance with Section 10 (a) of the Law to Protect the State as he was found to be collaborating with Moe Thu to incite unrest. He is a writer of fiction and not a news correspondent. [Ed. note: Soe Thein, an elected member of parliament and NLD party member, was released from prison on June 13, 2001 after serving five years.]

Ohn Kyaing was once employed as editor of the Kyemon and Hanthawaddy Myanmar Dailies but had been dismissed from his job in 1988. He had stood for election as a candidate of the NLD party and had been elected as a representative. The claim made in the report, that action had been taken against him for protesting the bloodshed of students in suppressive action taken by the Government and for writing and distributing anti-government pamphlets, is not true. He had been charged and subsequently found guilty of distributing pamphlets to create misunderstanding and discredit the Government in the eyes of the people in the disturbances that took place in Mandalay on 8-8-90. He was thus sentenced to seven years in prison under Section 5 (j) of the Emergency Provisions Act. He was further found guilty of inciting disturbances to enable the NLD to take over power and was therefore sentenced to additional prison term of ten years under Section 5 (a) and (b) of the Emergency Provisions Act.

Thein Tan never worked as news correspondent for the Kyemon or Hanthawaddy Daily but was the

Maung Tharya is well known in Myanmar literary circles as an author who is a crook. So he has gone to new fields abroad to work a scam on those who are still ignorant of his ill repute.

That the Reporters Sans Frontieres is at present the victim of his present scam is borne out by the claims made on behalf of Maung Tharya in their report.
owner of the Yadanabon Printing Press. He was an [organizer] of the NLD in Mandalay Division. He was charged with participating in movements to enable the NLD to take over State Power by unlawful means and being found guilty of violating the provisions of Section 5 (a), (b) and (j) of the Emergency Provisions Act, was sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

Aung Zin Min was not a contributor for New Style magazine. It is also not true that he was sentenced to seven year's imprisonment in 1996 and is serving a sentence in Thayawaddy prison for writing pro-democracy articles. Aung Zin Min was someone who dabbled in writing short articles and poems. He was sentenced to seven year's imprisonment under Section 5 (j) on 28-3-97 for his clandestine connections with the Burma Communist Party (BCP) armed insurgent group and not for writing pro-democracy articles.

The statement made in the report that free-lance correspondent Cho Seint had been arrested in July 1996 and sentenced to seven years in prison and is at present serving sentence in Thayawaddy jail for participating in the democracy movement is not true. Cho Seint was never a free-lance correspondent. He was employed as an unskilled laborer by Wut Yi Publishing House for only three months in 1987. He was charged and sentenced to seven years in prison not for participating in democracy movements but for having close contacts with the Burma Communist Party insurgent group and thereby violating Section 5 (j) of the Emergency Provisions Act.

Sein Hlaing and Myo Myint Nyein also are not bona fide news correspondents. They were each sentenced to seven years in prison for attempting to establish illegal organizations and distributing anti-government propaganda pamphlets. While in prison they were discovered in their attempts to write subversive pamphlets for distribution outside the prison. Thus further action has been taken against them in prison.

Allegations of Oppression and Prohibitions and the Actual Situation

THE ALLEGATION IN THE REPORT

It has been alleged that author Maung Tharya absconded from the country due to oppression by the Government and that he has not written a single word in ten years because after being given a warning by the authorities he thought it would be prudent to keep his "mouth shut."

FACT

Maung Tharya did not leave the country because the Government attempted to oppress him nor was he prohibited from writing. He is known as an arrogant person who is very high-handed in his relationship with others in literary circles, and as a result had been ostracized by many. Meanwhile his writing had deteriorated and he has not been able to write or publish a full-length novel for quite some time. Moreover, he had got himself into debt by putting up at various hotels but did not have the money to pay all his bills. The number of his readers had also become so small that he had no publishers for his books. Having reached the state where he had no income, he absconded from the country as a way of earning easy money. He has not been able to write and publish a single book in ten years, not because of any Government prohibition nor warning, but simply because publishers were reluctant to publish his books and incur losses. Myanmar literary circles and Maung Tharya himself knows this best. In fact, the news circulating in the Myanmar literary domain is that Maung Tharya absconded from the country because his books are no longer popular and he can no longer earn a decent income with such a small number of readers. His daughter Hpyo Tharya herself deplored the fact that her father had chosen the wrong course and absconded from the country in a written article for all to read. Maung Tharya is well known in Myanmar literary circles as an author who is a crook. So he has gone to new fields abroad to work a scam on those who are still ignorant of his ill repute. That the Reporters Sans Frontieres is at present the victim of his present scam is borne out by the claims made on behalf of Maung Tharya in their report.

The above is an excerpt from The Truth, a book published by the Ministry of Defence of the State Peace and Development Council.
Just Desserts

BY Daw San San Nweh

Translators note: The literal translation of the title of this story would be 'If you pull out a person's guts, his heart will feel immense pain' — that is, if you are viciously cruel to people they will feel such bitterness in their hearts that they will never forgive you. Although the events that have caused the old man in the story to be cast out by the villagers ostensibly occurred during the Japanese occupation in the 40s, most readers will easily draw parallels between his behavior and the behavior of the army and its ruling body, SLORC, during 1988-9, when this story was written. The author has succeeded in expressing the revulsion felt by vast numbers of ordinary Burmese towards the cruelty of the army, and indicates by the ending of the story her belief that those who choose to live by violence and cruelty can expect to die as violently as they live. The chosen companion of the old man is a tiger who turns on him, and in killing him, is itself killed. We can only assume that the censors failed to spot the subtext of this story, or else believed that it was sufficiently buried for them to let it through without being accused of incompetence.
The rubber stopper popped out of the honey jar. She pushed it back in a second time but after a moment it sprang out again. Hardly surprising, given that the stopper wasn’t the right fit for the jar. Khaing’s life had been like that once — she had found herself in a place where she simply did not fit. She had wanted to be a schoolteacher but had ended up with a degree in architecture from the Institute of Technology. Her marks in her end of school exam (10th standard) had been so good that she had been diverted from taking the course she really wanted to follow. And after finishing college, through her parents’ connections she had been found a government job as an accountant in a dockyard — a job with the grand title of naval engineer. Her work hadn’t the slightest connection with the subject she had studied at college; she just had to sign the requisition orders for diesel oil, engine oil and grease for the ships. The girl who at college was so bad at writing her name that no two signatures ever looked alike became the finest name-signer in the office. Day after day she just sat there, on her own, signing papers, not understanding what for; she had no clear responsibilities and no specific authority. Since the navy is a man’s world, Khaing found her main job was to sit and look pretty. She felt like an actress who had no chance of showing her skill on the stage, and who was simply expected to applaud the play’s director.

Eventually she became bored with sitting at a desk, dispirited, dissatisfied with being ordered around by people less well-qualified than she. Deciding she didn’t mind what her parents thought, Khaing turned her back on the hypocrites at work and took a job as an assistant teacher in a village middle school. The village, Tha-hla Bin-zee, lay at the foot of the mountains, far from any town. The villagers made an exceptionally good living from growing pulses, groundnuts and sesamum, and also went in for brick-making, charcoal-making and saw-milling on a large scale. Their living costs were lower than in Rangoon and food was cheap and in good supply.

No one was quite sure why the village was always known as Tha-hla Pay-Si, because it was written Tha-hla Bin-zee. Some people suggested it might be because the village had been established by two people called Tha Hla and Pay Si. But the old man Tha Hla, whom everyone called Saya Hla, — Teacher Hla — told her this was rubbish. “This village was here before we were born so it couldn’t have been named after us. That Pay Si fellow is just bragging, talking stuff and nonsense. He and I were born in the same year — 1920 — we’re 70 now and he’s still not learnt any sense. He makes his living by hunting.” [Tr. Note: In a Buddhist society those who live by taking life are despised.]

Saya Hla was short, with a round face and light complexion; from his looks it was difficult to guess his age. He always wore a locally woven longyi and a short-sleeved homespun shirt. A life-long vegetarian, he never ate any meat. He came across as a truly good person — though he did have a tendency to talk too much. From early morning he would set off round the village, going from house to house with his bag of medicines over his shoulder, treating the sick, taking no payment as he felt the merit earned was sufficient reward. The entire village loved and respected Saya Hla. Not Pay Si, though:
they hated him. He was shunned, excluded from the village, never allowed to enter it. He had to live on his own some way from the village in a cave dug in the hillside.

Khaing asked Saya Hla what crime Pay Si had committed to be treated like this. It didn’t seem right that such an elderly person should be expelled from the village. Couldn’t Saya Hla persuade the villagers to let him come back in?

“It’s best not to talk about it”, he told her. “I have already sounded them out. It’s no good. The people in this village do not forgive and forget, they won’t change their minds. That’s the way of this village.”

One beautiful summer morning when the jasmine flowers were in full bloom the results of the eighth standard examination were announced. The entire class of the village school had passed. Khaing, their teacher, was very popular indeed; her influence was at a high point. It occurred to her at this moment that there was a good chance of her being able to persuade the villagers to allow the outcast Pay Si back into the village.

In fact, Khaing had only met Pay Si once, when he had come to see her. Skin as dark as a charred palm stump, bandy-legged, shoulders bent.... On his large head his ears appeared very small. His teeth were stained dark brown.

“The name’s Pay Si, ma’am,” he had said. “I’ve brought you some honey and some orchids. I trod on a sharp stake and the wound is festering. Please can you give me some medicine for it? And with your influence in the village, please ask them to let me back in. And if they won’t agree, can you get me sent to an old people’s home?”

But the people of the village had bitterly rejected any suggestion that Pay Si should be allowed back, so she had got in touch with a home, and a place for him had been found, only the day before yesterday. A letter had come saying to bring him along. However it seemed that what Pay Si really wanted was not to go into a home in another village but to be allowed back to the place where he had been born. Khaing thought that if she tried again, right now, when she was so popular because of the exam successes, she might manage to persuade the villagers. But in the event she found their refusal even more determined.

“We will tell you briefly the history of Pay Si’s cruelty to our village and then you can decide for yourself. Even though every one of us is against letting him back we will abide by your decision as our schoolteacher. But be warned, there are bad things in Pay Si’s past life.”

“During the Japanese occupation he acted as their stooge and he became very powerful. The Japanese made him a health officer so all the traders in raw meat — beef, pork, chicken, fish, — before
they could sell their stuff in the market, had to obtain from him a certificate that their meat was free of disease. At that time we used to earn our living by raising livestock and hunting game, so you can imagine how we felt. He used to reject all the fresh meat and fish that came from Tha-hla Bin-zee, saying that it was dangerous for humans, just so he could get bribes. But when you looked at the produce of the people who coughed up a big enough bribe to satisfy him, you’d find he would certify that as safe, however rotten, stinking and maggot-infested it was. It was because of his behavior that honest working people were ruined. It was his fault that our village was completely stripped of its cattle, water buffalo and carts, every single one, by the Japanese. He never gave a thought to the interests of the village; he is an evil man who only ever considered the maintenance of his own prestige and position above everything else. When he was in power he persecuted others until their lives were ruined. Why should we take pity on such a person?"

Khaing had no reply. She had wanted to be the peacemaker but now found herself feeling bitter too. She no longer wanted to go against the will of the village. There was nothing left but to send Pay Si off to the old people’s home.

That night Khaing couldn’t sleep. She kept hearing the sound of a tiger roaring. She remembered that some villagers had reported to her that Pay Si kept a tiger in his cave, and she wondered if it was true. Dogs from the village often went missing — the suspicion crossed her mind that Pay Si might be luring them away to feed the tiger.

The next morning Pay Si’s dead body was found by the villagers in his cave; it had been mauled by the tiger which also lay dead, its guts hanging out, about an arm’s length away.

"A tiger that is kept captive and not fed well enough is bound to devour its master — what can you expect? Pay Si had it coming to him [lit. brought about his own fate]," remarked the villagers to their teacher, Khaing.

San San Nweh first came to prominence in the mid-1970s and became actively involved in the National League for Democracy after September 1988. She was arrested on the same day in 1989 as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, but was released after 10 months. After her release her work was at first allowed into print but following the clamp down by the military in December 1991 (at the time of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi) she was totally banned.

This story appeared in the September 1990 issue of Burma’s Sabe-U Fiction Magazine. It was translated into English by Anna J. Allott in March 1994, shortly before San San Nweh was re-arrested in August of 1994. The mother of seven children, San San Nweh’s husband died in 1992. She is now serving a ten-year prison sentence.
An Address by U Win Tin
December 9, 1988

This is an English version of the introductory words spoken by U Win Tin, editor of the Burmese newspaper, Hanthawadi, on the occasion of a literary gathering arranged and held by the National League for Democracy to mark Writers’ Day (sa-hso-daw nei). The gathering, which is traditionally known in Burmese as a sa-pei haw-pyaw-bwe, featured two main speakers, author Maung Thawka and the poet U Tin Moe. Maung Thawka and U Tin Moe both since fled the country to live in exile. U Win Tin was arrested in 1989 and sentenced to 14 years in prison.
hadn't even realised that Writers' Day was upon us, until the young ones came and told me that it was today. What I mean by saying this is that it shows just how much we have been pouring all our thoughts and all our energies into the struggle for democracy.

When this cool season comes literary folk, people who live by the Pen — writers, poets, reporters, journalists — all are bitten by the literary bug. They feel the urge to get up on the platform, to hold the microphone, to talk to an audience. And I dare say some quite famous speakers like Saya Thawka, like Saya Tin Moe, as the years have gone by, can hardly tell when 'Writers' Month', the season for literary talks, begins and when it ends as they have been and are in such demand.

In our (NLD) organization there are quite a few persons connected with literature. More than a few — a lot, in fact. Perhaps everyone connected in some way with writing is in our organization, there are so many of us. With so many people involved in this struggle for democracy, we forgot to eat, to sleep, even forgot about literature until the young ones arranged this Writers' Day meeting to remind us, for which we are most grateful to them. I am saying this thank you on behalf of all writers, poets, reporters and journalists.

We have many special days in Burma: Independence Day, Union Day, Resistance Day, Peasants' Day, Martyrs' Day, and of course we make speeches on those days. But there are never as many gatherings for speeches on those occasions as when it comes to Writers' Month, and the talks that are given about literature to mark Writers' Day. Then of course we hear some very good and very famous speakers, as well as some people who are no good at speaking at all.

Why is this Writers' Day, this Writers' Season so important in the life of Burma? Because the gatherings that are held provide the opportunity to speak freely, we have freedom of expression. However bad the fascist regime was, however dark the times, we never lost our democratic rights during Writers' Month. That's why we — writers, reporters, journalists and poets — are firmly maintaining the excellent tradition of this special day and seizing the opportunity to speak freely.

Writers' Day was first held in the very dark days of fascism under the Japanese. But at that time we were allowed to make speeches. And we certainly did. Authors went up on the stage and performed — not because they wanted to perform but because they had something they wanted to say. And they said what they wanted to say. They said that people had been deprived of their rights, that they were being oppressed, but they said these things by performing a play. And from that time on until today, Writers' Day has continued. Not once has the day been missed, right up to today, to this meeting called by our young comrades of the National League for Democracy. Never once has it gone unmarked. It was celebrated under fascism, under the AFPFL [Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League], under the Union, even under the BSSP [Burma Socialist Programme Party]. Not until this year has it been missed. What does this show? It shows how far the right to speak freely has been lost, how far it has been extinguished. But now that these young people with their reverence for literature have arranged this sort of a ceremony here, we have not
yet lost hope. However great the darkness that hangs over us, there is still the light of democracy. Their action shows that we can still find it. If we open the door to democracy it will be open for us. If we dare, we can speak out, we can win people over, we can act. So for this reason I want to say thank you to the young ones.

The second thing I want to say is thank you very much to the very famous writers, known throughout the length and breadth of Burma, who have come to speak to us in the NLD. Saya Maung Thawka, whose every phrase uttered is memorable, who is so eloquent, is going to talk to us about literature and life. I am sure he will talk about the life we are facing, the life in which democracy has been extinguished. I guess he will talk about the connection between literature and a life with no democracy.

As for Saya Tin Moe, who is going to speak about youth and poetry, there is no need for me to say very much. The young devotees of literature who have come here today can be said to have grown up on Saya Tin Moe's poems. [We older folk missed out on this.] So great has been the influence of his poetry. When I was a child we didn't learn by heart Saya Tin Moe's poems and recite them, so I don't know his children's rhymes, but I do remember one of his poems for grown-ups. This is how his very well-known verse goes: "The cigar's burnt down, the sun is brown, will someone please take me home." I just want to say that this is the poem of a very wise grown-up.

Time has run out, the sun has gone down, our time has passed, hasn't it? And the cigar's burnt down. At this point what does a wise, a perceptive person say? 'Please someone take me home!' 'Home' means to his correct place, of course. He takes the trouble to say 'Take me home.'

But what is happening today is that some important people are not very wise. There are large numbers of important people who don't know that they should say 'Please take me home now.' Today there are many, many political problems in our country, so many insurmountable difficulties, so many unspeakable matters — and why? Because if some leading people knew when their cigar was burnt down, when the sun was brown and knew when they should say 'Please take me home', then our country's politics would not have gotten into such a mess.

In the future our country will need to work with the fresh energies of young people. Today these new energies have opened a new chapter in Burmese politics. With blood and sweat they opened it; with rallying cries and with demands, with great sacrifice they opened it. We must feel embarrassed in front of these young people. And we must support them. We must see clearly and understand the strengths and the capabilities of these young people. We must realize that we can depend on these young people. Although we have been carrying out the nation's tasks for a certain length of time, the day will come when we will have to realize that the 'cigar has burnt down, that the sun has turned brown'. We understand that when that time comes we must know how to say 'Please take us home now'. These are our good intentions. But if, in spite of understanding, in spite of our good intentions, we should refuse to go back home where we should be, then I say to you — just send us back home by force. That is all!

Editor's note: Given the time and place of the talk, it seems clear that U Win Tin is implying that it is time for the military government to step down.
WASHINGTON, DC — On June 19th, the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, and the Burmese community of Washington, DC commemorated Women of Burma Day in honor of the 56th birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi at Rayburn House Office Building.

The International Republican Institute hosted a discussion on May 2nd by Dr. Christina Fink about her recent book, *Living Silence: Burma Under Military Rule*, and the U.S. government’s critical role in facilitating political change in Burma.

British human rights activist James Mawdsley and student leader Aung Din spoke at the Asia Pacific Center for Justice and Peace, which co-sponsored the event with Free Burma Coalition on May 24th.

An April 11th Burma Roundtable featured Priscilla Clapp, U.S. Charge d'affaires to Burma since July 1999, who commented on the recent developments in Burma. Ms. Clapp spoke at the St. Regis Hotel at an April 18th breakfast briefing sponsored by the Asia Society.

The Washington Roundtable is co-sponsored by Human Rights Watch/Asia, Refugees International, Jesuit Refugee Service and U.S. Committee for Refugees. For more information contact Refugees International by phone: (202) 828-0110 or fax (202) 828-0819.

NEW YORK, NY — The Open Society Institute’s Burma Project sponsored a June 25th panel presentation focusing on openness of scientific data related to HIV/AIDS, women’s issues, and compassion towards those afflicted with HIV/AIDS. Panel speakers include Dr. Chris Beyrer, Therese Caouette, and Dr. Thaung Htun. For more information contact The Burma Project at (212) 548-0632.

On June 11th, authors Thant Myint-U, Christina Fink and photographer Chan Chao spoke at an event entitled "Burma Beneath the Surface: Three Perspectives," hosted by the Burma Project/Southeast Asia Initiative of the Open Society Institute.

The New York Roundtable holds periodic meetings of organizations and individuals interested in Burma. For more information contact the Burma UN Service Officer by phone: (212) 338-0048 or by fax: (212) 338-0049.

NEW ENGLAND — The New England Roundtable met May 17th to discuss lobbying strategies, including a letter-writing campaign, for the Massachusetts Burma Divestment Bill.

The New England Burma Roundtable is an informal group of individuals and organizations working to promote human rights and democracy in Burma. Meetings are held the second Monday of every month. For information contact Simon Billenness of Trillium Asset Management by phone: (617) 423-6655 Ext. 225 or email: sbillenness@trilliuminvest.com.

GERMANY — The Burma Bureau Germany, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and Burma Project Berlin sponsored “Burma after the Military Dictatorship — Shaping Concepts for Democratic Transition,” a conference which took place May 31st and June 1st at FES in Berlin.

LONDON — The Britain-Burma Society sponsored a slide lecture on June 20th by Daw Tin Tin Myaing entitled “December in Rangoon” at the Medical Society of London.

On May 10th, the Society hosted Vicky Bowman’s slide presentation of her recent automobile trip throughout the eastern reaches of Shan State.

Gerry Abbott and his wife Daw Khin Thant Han gave a March 15th lecture on Burmese folk tales at the Britain-Burma Society.

The Britain-Burma Society meets seven times a year to focus on cultural and historical issues and facilitate academic exchange. For more information contact Derek Brooke-Wavell by phone: 44-118-947-6874 or by fax: 44-118-954-6201 or email: d.wavell@ntlworld.com.

CANADA — The Toronto Burma Roundtable meets monthly to discuss issues relating to Burma and plan educational and political events. For more information contact Elizabeth Shepherd by phone: (416) 465-3458 or email: mandalay@sprint.ca.

NETHERLANDS — The Netherlands Burma Roundtable is held once every two months with the goal of updating organizations and individuals on current events and activities surrounding Burma. For more information contact The Burma Centrum Netherland by phone: 31-20-671-69-52 or by fax: 31-20-671-35-13.
JOINS LOS ANGELES, SAN FRANCISCO AND MINNEAPOLIS, WHOSE CITY COUNCILS
THE CITY’S PENSION AND RETIREMENT FUNDS TO DIVEST FROM COMPANIES THAT
HAVE ALSO PASSED BANS ON INVESTMENT. THE BILL, WHICH WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY, WAS SPONSORED BY COMMISSIONER ERIC STEN. OREGON’S MOST POPULOUS CITY NOW

9 COMMENCING FROM THAT DAY, ILO CONVENTION 87, THAT GIVES THE
WORKER THE RIGHT TO FREELY FORM UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS, HAS BEEN
VIOLENTLY REVOKED AND FORCED LABOR PRACTICES STILL CONTINUED. AT THE
MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE ILO IN NOVEMBER A VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MATTER.

15 THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE ILO CALLED ON ALL INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO REVIEW THEIR ASSOCIATION AND ACTIVITIES WITH THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT SO AS NOT TO ENCOURAGE THE PRACTICE OF FORCED LABOR. ALSO TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS SET OUT IN THE ILO INQUIRY COMMISSION REPORT RESOLUTIONS TAKEN WITH REGARD TO THE VIOLATIONS WERE:

a) To place these matters on the agenda for consideration at the ECOSOC meeting in July 2001.

b) That the UN General Assembly should carefully examine whether the activities of the UN agencies in Burma are in any way directly or indirectly associated with forced labor practices.

16 IN THE 81 YEARS OF THE LIFETIME OF THE ILO THAT IS COMPOSED OF 178 COUNTRIES THERE HAS NEVER BEEN SUCH REBUKE AND PUNISHMENT OF A MEMBER GOVERNMENT.

17 DEMOCRACY IS THE ONLY SYSTEM BY WHICH FULL HUMAN RIGHTS AND WORKERS RIGHTS CAN BE OBTAINED. STRONG AND FIRM POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT WILL FOLLOW WHEN THERE IS DEMOCRACY. THEREFORE, THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT (SPDC), WHICH HAS ASSUMED STATE POWER, HAS GREATEST RESPONSIBILITY TO BRING ABOUT CHANGES THAT WILL MAKE BURMA INTO A NEW DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY. WE ASK AND URGE THEM TO HEED TO THIS REQUEST.

CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY

PORTLAND PASSES DIVESTMENT RESOLUTION
Portland’s City Council passed an April 18th resolution directing the city’s pension and retirement funds to divest from companies that invest in Burma. The bill, which was passed unanimously, was sponsored by Commissioner Eric Sten. Oregon’s most populous city now joins Los Angeles, San Francisco and Minneapolis, whose city councils have also passed bans on investment.

JAPAN TO RESUME AID PROGRAM
The Japanese government approved a US$28.6 million aid package to Burma — Japan’s first significant aid package to the country since 1997. According to the International Herald Tribune, sources close to the Burmese government-democratic opposition dialogue confirmed that Japan’s aid package is designed to reward the regime for sustaining the talks. The ODA is designed to help lay off Burma’s severe power-supply...
ETHNIC VIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH SAW THA KU, an ethnic Karen soldier who deserted from the Burmese Army.

Q: When you were at the Army camp, did they call villagers for work?
A: They called the villagers to do loh ah pay [forced labor]. They forced them to cut down the forest, dig out the roots and stumps of trees, and then burn or carry away the branches. They usually called 18, 19, or 20 villagers from each village, big or small. They called them once or twice a month, for three or four days each time.

Q: Did they pay them for that?
A: I didn’t see them paying them. They just specified the date for loh ah pay and then kept them for three or four days. The Army camp fed them rice. When the villagers went back, I didn’t see them being given anything.

Q: Did your unit capture porters where you worked?
A: They captured porters there. They called it Army won-tan [servants], but it was portering. They called one villager from each house to carry rations. Some villagers didn’t come because they didn’t have enough food, they had to work and weren’t free to go. They arrested the villagers who were hiding [from forced labor; in this context ‘arrested’ means captured them and forced them to go]. When they didn’t arrest them, they fined them. Some villagers couldn’t go, so they forced them to pay 1,000 kyat per day. They called both men and women.

Q: How many porters did they take to the front line?
A: I saw that they collected 14, 15, or 20 porters for each column. Sometimes they had to go for one or two weeks. When a visiting unit came up [a column coming into Karen areas for special operations], they had to go for four or five months.


SPDC SPEAKS

The following is a translation of an original order issued in Burmese by an SPDC Battalion Commander to a village head in Karen State. It is taken from SPDC & DKBA Orders to Villages: Set 2001-A, May 2001, by Karen Human Rights Group.

#60 Infantry Battalion
Battalion Headquarters Office

URGENT:
#60 Infantry Battalion
Kyauk Kyi town

Letter N. 1000/10/Ool
Date: Year 2000, November 2nd
To: Chairperson/Secretary
village
Kyauk Kyi town

Subject: Informing [you] to send loh ah pay [forced laborers]

1) Infantry Battalion #60 requires village support for Battalion construction work, so you are informed to send loh ah pay workers on the dates specified below.

A) Dates to be sent:
   1) 3-11-2000 Friday
   2) 4-11-2000 Saturday

B) Number to be sent: (5) people

C) Materials to be brought: Each should bring mattocks and machetes

2) As this is emergency loh ah pay, it is informed to come without fail on the specified two days. [The workers] will be released at 10 o’clock in the morning, so the number of people specified should come without fail.

[Sd. ‘aaaa’]
(for) Battalion Commander

BRIEFINGS AND DEVELOPMENTS

RAZALI REVISITS BURMA

The June 1st-4th mission of Razali Ismail to Burma — the first visit of the UN Special Envoy since January and the fourth since he assumed the post a little over a year ago — came on the heels of media speculation that the talks between the military junta and democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi had stalled. The closed-door dialogue resumed in late May after more than two months of what has been described in the press as political deadlock.

ALTSEAN URGES INCREASED PRESSURE ON JUNTA

An international convention of Burma democracy advocates held in mid-March called for the inclusion of ethnic nationality group representation in the recent dialogue between the military junta and the democratic opposition. The International Strategy Meeting, which was comprised of 53 organizations from 28 countries, declared its support for the talks but stressed the importance of tripartite discussion. In a statement released March 20th, Alternative ASEAN-Burma demanded the release of all political prisoners, the lifting of restrictions on the National League for Democracy, the cessation of all military hostilities and the end of forced labor. The statement also urged ASEAN to officially support the dialogue process and for the international community both to implement the ILO resolution and to withhold development assistance in order to step up pressure on the regime.

PAKISTAN-BURMA RELATIONS WARMING

Pakistan Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf met with General Than Shwe to discuss economic cooperation between Pakistan and Burma, marking the first meeting between the two countries in 16 years. During the talks, which took place on May 2nd, the two leaders signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in science and technology. Before leaving Burma for Vietnam, General Musharraf continued on page 38
commented, "It is Pakistan's desire to get closer to [Burma]. The future looks bright." Pakistan has long been suspected of supplying weapons to the Burmese military regime. Musharraf appointed himself president of Pakistan on June 20, 2001.

**IMPRISONED BURMESE TEACHERS HONORED**

Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, awarded its first Human Rights Award to Burmese educators Daw Thida Htway, U Ye Tint and Daw Khin Khin Leh, who have been imprisoned in Burma since July of 1999 for political activism. The award was presented at the March 30th Human Rights Ceremony, by Her Majesty Rania al-Abdullah, Queen of Jordan. Earlier in the month, Members of Congress sent letters addressed to SPDC Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, Secretary-1, identifying the three teachers as "prisoners of conscience" and demanding that the government "remove any obstacles from their path of attending [Trinity's] honoring ceremony."

**EU TO CONTINUE SANCTIONS**

The European Union renewed sanctions against Burma for another six months, advising the military regime to take "concrete steps" towards reconciliation with the democratic opposition. The April 9th statement determined to extend the sanctions that the EU begin in April of last year for another six months due to the lack of "substantial progress" towards improvement of human rights conditions. The policy bans visits from ruling military generals, denies arms sales and suspends non-humanitarian aid.

**ILO PROBES BURMA'S LABOR PRACTICES**

On May 19th the UN labor arm, the International Labour Organization (ILO), confirmed plans with the Burmese Government to send a High Level Team (HLT) to Burma to probe the military regime's labor practices. According to the agreement, "The HLT shall have complete discretion to establish and implement its program... and be accorded full cooperation from... Myanamar authorities." The arrangement followed an unpublicized meeting held from May 17 to 19 between an ILO delegation and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to discuss the eradication of forced labor. The ILO Governing Body met in Geneva in June and agreed to maintain pressure on the military regime pending the results of the upcoming mission to Burma.

**IVANHOE DENIES FORCED LABOR ALLEGATIONS**

In a June 14th letter to Ivanhoe Mines Ltd. Chairman Robert Friedland, two labor groups demanded that the mining company withdraw from its Monywa copper mine project. The letter cited the decision by International Labour Organization (ILO) to sanction Burma, as well as testimony provided by the ILO that found over 100,000 forced laborers were used to build a Monywa railway and hydroelectric plant. Ivanhoe, which operates its Monywa copper mine as a joint venture with the military regime, denies the allegations of forced labor. The Canadian Labor Congress (CLC), a Canadian labor organization, and the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), a global trade union federation, co-authored the letter.

**SIX EXILED MPS MEET WITH THAI GOVERNMENT**

In an unprecedented exchange, Thailand's House of Parliament met with a delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) that included six exiled Burmese Members of Parliament. During the May 22nd meeting, the Burmese delegation conferred with Chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Kraisak Choonhavan, along with other MPs, on the current Thai-Burma border conflict. Following the discussion, eleven Thai parliamentarians signed a petition calling for the recognition of the 1990 Burmese elections, marking the first show of such support from Thai elected officials. The meeting occurred amid an escalation of tension between Thailand and Burma, apparent in the recent border skirmishes and diplomatic discord.

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**ASHES AND TEARS: INTERVIEWS WITH REFUGEES FROM BURMA ON GUAM**

By: Project Maje
March 2001

Project Maje
3610 NE 70th Ave.
Portland OR 97213
www.projectmaje.org
Tel/fax: 503.226.2189

Project Maje documents the experiences of recently-arrived Burmese refugees in Guam, exploring topics ranging from the AIDS epidemic to environmental degradation, from religious persecution to forced labor. The report consists of 17 interviews with Burmese refugees of different ethnic backgrounds and both sexes.

**LIVING SILENCE: BURMA UNDER MILITARY RULE**

By: Christina Fink
2001

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c/o Roxanne Hunte
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Fax: 212.777.6359
www.palgrave.com

_Living Silence_ studies the effects of military oppression on Burmese society, approaching its subject from a variety of angles, including the study of families, communities, prison, the military, religion and magic, education and the artistic community. Fink employs personal accounts from a diverse selection of people — conducted from both inside and outside the country — while simultaneously texturing her portrait of Burmese society with a deconstruction of military influence in terms of Burmese political history.

**THE ROYAL ADMINISTRATION OF BURMA**

By: Pagan Undauk U Tin
Translated by Euan Bagshawe
2001

Ava Publishing House
1173-1179 Srinakharin Road
Suan Luang
Bangkok, 10250
Email: ava@book.co.th

_U Tin's_ Myanma Min Okchokpon Sadan, which was published in 1931, describes the workings of the pre-colonial and colonial Burmese governments. The author worked as a civil servant under the King of Burma and the British administration, and examines both in detail.
KALAMA SUTTA: SEEING IS BELIEVING
Directed by Holly Fisher
March 2001
9 Murray Street, 10 NW
New York, NY 10007
Tel/fax: 212.349.5445
zacho@mindspring.com

Fisher's film documents Burma's internal conflict by capturing the views of generals, democracy activists, citizenry, and refugees. The film combines the footage, which was shot while Fisher and fellow producer Katherine Pieratos traveled Burma disguised as tourists, with archival film, colonial home movies, and interviews with exiled Burmese. Kalama Sutta premiered in February at the Berlin International Film Festival. It was shown at several international film festivals in Europe throughout March.

THE MAKING OF MODERN BURMA
By Thant Myint-U
2001
Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building
Cambridge
CB22RU
United Kingdom
www.cup.org

Thant Myint-U's book gives detailed analyses of both Burma's political and social transformations during the nineteenth century. His study focuses on the ways in which the changes of this period informed the modern concepts of Burmese identity, society and state.

ABUSE UNDER ORDERS: THE SPDC AND DKBA ARMY'S THROUGH THE EYES OF THEIR SOLDIERS
By Karen Human Rights Group
March 2001
www.khrg.org
khrg@khrg.org

Karen Human Rights Group's latest report examines various aspects of the Burmese military in detail. Documenting recruitment tactics, training procedures, and everyday life in both the Tatmadaw and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, the report uses primary sources to dissect the military through the microcosm of the individual soldiers who comprise it.

POWELL QUESTIONS JAPAN'S AID PLAN
U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell called into question the wisdom of Japan's Official Development Assistance package to Burma while addressing the Senate Appropriations Committee on March 15th. During the Senate hearings Powell declared, "The Japanese are making an investment in a hydroelectric plant [in Burma, and this is] not a proper investment to be made at this time with this regime." Citing the uncertainty of the progression of the recent dialogue between the government and Aung San Suu Kyi, Powell suggested that the "few and dim [rays of hope]" for democracy in Burma are not promising enough to deserve Japan's grant-in-aid.

SENATORS INTRODUCE BAN ON IMPORTS
On May 22nd, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) introduced a bill to institute an across-the-board ban on U.S. importation of Burmese goods. Designed to prohibit the importation of any "article that is produced, manufactured, or grown in Burma," Bill S. 926 seals a gap created by the 1997 presidential ban on investment in Burma, which still permits importation. Despite the Burmese government's poor human rights record, the U.S. importation of Burmese-made apparel alone has increased 372% since 1997 and continues to grow. The bill was co-sponsored by Harkin, Republicans Mitch McConnell and Jesse Helms as well as Democrats Patrick Leahy and Dianne Feinstein.

35 U.S. SENATORS URGE BUSH TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON BURMA
In an April 2nd letter to President George W. Bush, 35 Senators urged the administration to maintain the 1997 ban on U.S. investment in Burma. While the letter called on Bush to uphold the current economic policy until the military regime honors the results of the 1990 elections and restores democracy, it also cited the country's continued production of opium and the condemnation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) of forced labor in its November 2000 decision.

BUSH CONTINUES SANCTIONS
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BUSINESS WATCH (CONTINUED)
shortage, focusing on the repair of the Baluchaung hydroelectric power plant, which was built in Karen State forty years ago using now-outdated technology.

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The Student Assembly of the University of Michigan passed a resolution on April 16th to encourage the University of Michigan to end investment in companies that do business with Burma. The University of Michigan currently has connections with Unocal and owns stock in Total and Halliburton, all companies involved in the construction of an oil pipeline in Burma. The decision preceded the April 17th 24-hour fast for which students from 91 colleges and universities from ten countries united to call for the immediate release of Burma's student political prisoner Min Ko Naing and to demand that universities and colleges deny contracts with corporations operating in Burma.

BURMA DEBATE WINTER 2000/2001
CORRECTIONS
Please note the name of the poet who composed the poem "Goodbye Thailand" (pg. 39) should have read Ko Ko Thett.
In the article "Seeds of Destruction," the final line on pg. 9 should read, "the Second Meeting of States Parties." The correct spelling of the name of the author of the article is Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan.

Inside Washington

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The Burma Project initiates, supports and administers a wide range of programs and activities. Priority is given to programs that promote the well-being and progress of all the people of Burma regardless of race, ethnic background, age or gender.

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http://www.burmaproject.org
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